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‘Solidarity Across Borders’: online gender activism and the construction of a Middle East and North African regional public space

Bronwen Mehta 

ABSTRACT

Academic discourse frequently speaks of *a* gender violence in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), suggesting a distinctive gender violence that is tied to a geographic location. Within the framework of a digital ethnography, this research examines whether gender activists operating in digital spaces *themselves* conceptualise and mobilise around their struggle using a regional lens, combining observations, a multimodal analyses of social media content, and interviews with 20 digital activists to do so. Challenging orientalist narratives, I centre the ontological agency of these (predominantly) young, (predominantly) women digital activists from and within the region in defining, contesting, and (re)producing the MENA within their resistance to gender violence. This timely intervention comes after a string of feminicides in June/July 2022 led to calls for a regional Women’s General Strike going viral across social media platforms. Following the strike’s slogan, *تضامن عابر الحدود* (Solidarity Across Borders), this research explores the potentialities and limitations of regional solidarities as a vehicle for building feminist public spaces. Contributing to debates within transnational feminist research regarding activism’s multiple spatialities, I examine how strike participants, through their framings of regional gender-based violence and the networks and identities built around said framings, navigate sameness and difference in dynamic and sometimes divisive ways. Within the strike context, we see a fragile regional public being formed that simultaneously challenges and reproduces narratives of gender violence in the MENA in ways that demonstrate both the salience of regionality and the importance of including activist voices in our regional constructions.

Le discours académique parle souvent d’une violence de genre au Moyen-Orient et en Afrique du Nord (MENA), ce qui laisse entendre une violence de genre distincte liée au lieu géographique. Dans le cadre d’une ethnographie numérique, ce travail de recherche examine si les activistes de genre opérant *eux-mêmes* dans des espaces numériques conceptualisent et se mobilisent autour de leur lutte, en appliquant un prisme régional et en combinant des observations, une analyse multimodale de contenus de réseaux sociaux, et des entretiens avec 20 activistes numériques pour le faire. Remettant en question les fils narratifs orientalistes, je centre le libre arbitre

KEYWORDS

Regionality; digital activism; Middle East and North Africa; gender-based violence; feminicides

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ontologique de ces activistes numériques (majoritairement) jeunes et (majoritairement) femmes originaires de la région et y résidant au moment de définir, de contester et de (re)produire la région MENA dans le cadre de leur résistance à la violence fondée sur le genre. Cette intervention arrive à point nommé après qu'une série de féminicides commis en juin/juillet 2022 a conduit à des appels à une grève générale des femmes dans la région, qui est devenue virale sur les réseaux sociaux. Ce travail de recherche adopte le slogan de la grève, *تضامن عابر للحدود* (Solidarité sans frontières), pour explorer les potentialités et les limites des solidarités régionales en tant que moyen de construire des espaces publics féministes. Contribuant aux débats dans le secteur de la recherche féministe transnationale concernant les multiples spatialités de l'activisme, j'examine comment les participantes à la grève, à travers leurs définitions de la violence fondée sur le genre au niveau régional et les réseaux et identités construits autour de ces définitions, naviguent entre similitude et différence de manières dynamiques et pouvant parfois créer des divisions. Dans le contexte de la grève, nous voyons se former un public régional fragile qui remet en question et reproduit simultanément les fils narratifs de la violence fondée sur le genre dans la région MENA, ce de façons qui démontrent à la fois le caractère essentiel de la régionalité et l'importance d'inclure les voix des activistes dans nos constructions régionales.

Frecuentemente, el discurso académico habla de la violencia de género en Oriente Medio y el Norte de África (MENA, por sus siglas en inglés), haciendo alusión a un tipo de violencia de género distintiva y ligada a cierta ubicación geográfica. En el marco de una etnografía digital que combina observaciones, un análisis multimodal de los contenidos presentes en medios sociales y entrevistas con 20 activistas digitales, esta investigación examina si las activistas de género que operan en espacios digitales conceptualizan y se movilizan en su lucha empleando una óptica regional. Desafiando las narrativas orientalistas, hago hincapié en la agencia ontológica de las activistas digitales — predominantemente mujeres jóvenes procedentes de la región e insertas en ella—, en su definición, su impugnación y su (re)producción en MENA dentro de su oposición a la violencia de género. Esta oportuna intervención se produce tras una serie de feminicidios perpetrados en junio y julio de 2022, que provocó llamados a una Huelga General de Mujeres regional. La convocatoria se volvió viral en varias plataformas de redes sociales. Siguiendo el lema de la huelga, *تضامن عابر للحدود* (Solidaridad a través de las fronteras), este estudio explora las potencialidades y limitaciones de las solidaridades regionales como vehículo para construir espacios públicos feministas. Además de contribuir a los debates inherentes a la investigación feminista transnacional sobre las múltiples espacialidades del activismo, en el estudio analizo cómo las participantes en la huelga, a partir de sus encuadres en torno a la violencia de género regional y a las redes e identidades construidas en torno a los mismos, navegan la igualdad y la diferencia de formas dinámicas y a veces divisivas. En el contexto de la huelga vemos la formación de un frágil público regional que desafía y reproduce simultáneamente narrativas de la violencia de género en MENA de formas que visibilizan la relevancia de la regionalidad y la importancia de incluir voces activistas en nuestras construcciones regionales.

Introduction

In response to the brutal public feminicide of Nayera Ashraf in Mansoura, Egypt in June 2022¹ followed by the copycat killing of Iman Irsheed in Jordan a few days later,² a campaign was launched across social media to demand a Middle East and North Africa-(MENA) wide General Strike on 6 July 2022 (Mahmoud 2022). This campaign called on women across the region and diaspora to withhold labour and demand systemic responses to what was presented as the ubiquitous regional problem of gender-based violence (GBV). Many MENA-focused social media accounts tackling GBV embraced this regional approach, joining the call. In the following weeks both the official strike and other activist accounts linked these trigger incidents of two young women being publicly murdered to other feminicides in the region, including that of Lubna Mansour (a Jordanian-Palestinian woman murdered by her husband in the UAE),³ Shaima Gamal (an Egyptian presenter killed by her husband),⁴ and Manal Qadash (an Algerian student stabbed to death),⁵ generating narratives of a regional wave of feminicides. In the context of restrictive laws on bodily autonomy, insufficient mechanisms of support and justice for victims of GBV, and exclusion from traditional public spaces, this strike campaign emerges from a rich history of gender activism in the region invigorated by the Arab Spring protests and increasingly mediated through digital technologies. Although the strike had offline elements, the mobilisation originated and largely took place on social media and, consequently, this research focuses on the campaign's digital dimensions.

The strike employed the slogan, 'تضامن عابر للحدود' (Solidarity Across Borders), imagining a transnational public founded upon solidarity collectively acting to challenge GBV. The official statement bound this strike campaign to the MENA region: 'we, the women of the MENA region', locating and limiting the public (WomenStrike22 2022). Although participating activists were influenced by the originating account, the fragmented nature of the digital mobilisation (Sadler 2021) created heterogeneities that at once cultivated and disrupted the space-generative potential of the regional solidarities being formed. Much of this heterogeneity reflects the MENA's highly contested nature, with debates over whether the region's foundations lie in the shared histories, the shared Arab identity, the strategic geopolitical relevance to neo-imperial powers, or whether MENA itself is outdated and needs replacing with decolonial concepts like South-West Asia and North Africa (SWANA). Here, activists operate as ontological agents, challenging top-down and Western-constructed narratives through defining the region and establishing their place within it.

This research speaks to debates in transnational feminist literature on activism's spatial dimensions (Basu 2000; Deb 2016; Stephan and Charrad 2020) and its potential to imagine regional subjectivities (Chhachhi and Abeysekera 2015). Employing Social Movement Theory (SMT), I use observations, multimodal analysis of social media content, and semi-structured interviews with 20 activists, to examine the development of regional solidarities through processes of framing regional GBV and forming identities and networks to resist it (Tilly and Tarrow 2015). This article demonstrates how these solidarities, which acted as the foundation of the strike's regional public, were characterised by

diversity and variance in their perspectives of the solidarity, framings of GBV, and formulations of the region. The latter resulted in numerous articulations of the MENA being presented, each challenging and reproducing existing regional narratives in important ways. Activists navigated the tensions of building collective publics across such differences. Some saw value in the diversity, allowing for rich spaces of regional knowledge production, collaboration, and mobilisation to develop. Simultaneously, the strike experienced contradictions within and limitations to the solidarities, manifesting through bordering and exclusionary practices, and demographic hierarchies within the context of a loose digital network that failed to generate longer-lasting relationships. Thus, we are left with cross-border feminist solidarities both offering lucrative opportunities for regional public spaces to form, while also confronting us with contradiction and fragmentation.

Methodology

This research is part of a broader digital ethnography looking at place in cyberfeminist activism in the MENA. It contains three overlapping phases: investigation, immersion, and interaction (Kozinets 2020), with reflections on positionality throughout.

To navigate my relationship to this research, I adopt elements of Walstrom's (2004) participant-experiencer approach, situating a researcher who has personal experience of the central problem, here gender violence, as an active participant in the spaces; and Mustafa's (2024) fellowship approach, defining a co-productive relationship between the researcher and the 'subjects' that involves care, transparency, and allyship, while also acknowledging the disproportionate power the researcher holds. As a young woman who lived in the MENA working on women's issues within a media context, and as a survivor of sexual violence myself, elements of my identity align with many of the research participants. Beyond this being a research motivation, following Walstrom's model, it contributes to understanding the affective impact of activism within these spaces. In the interview setting, bonds often formed between me and the interlocutors based on shared experiences of patriarchal violence. However, the interview relationship is still one in which I maintain ethical responsibility and disproportionate power over shaping the conversation and final output. Furthermore, I do not have MENA heritage, and while I am not white, it is essential to acknowledge the privileged perspective from which I enter this space, as someone physically situated in the West, studying at a Western institution, and benefiting from all the protections that endows.

The investigative stage involves defining the scope of the research. While the strike idea originated from a single profile across Instagram (@WomenStrike22) and Twitter/X (@Generalwomenstr), it was not a cohesive centrally controlled movement (Mahmoud 2022). Through prioritising short-form commentary, the tensions that collectives experience over identity are exacerbated on online platforms, with the reader assembling content fragments to form broader narratives (Sadler 2018, 2021). As activists input their own fragments, shaping discourse and contributing to overall narratives, it was important to look beyond the @WomenStrike22 account. I used Marcus' (1995) *following* to identify

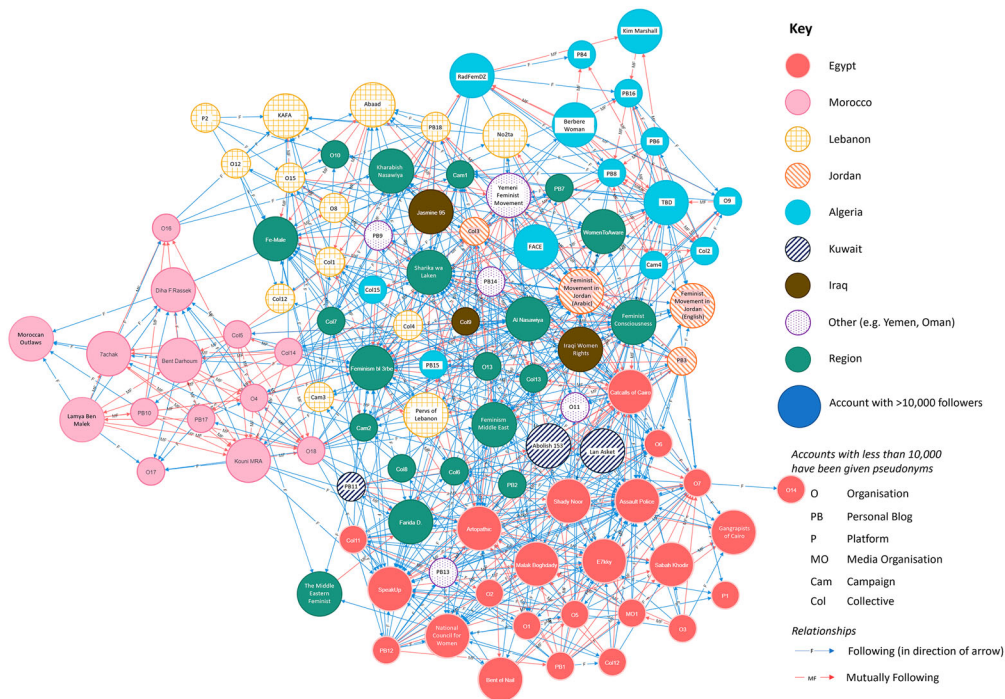


Figure 1. Digital ecosystem network map.

further case studies. I first ‘followed the people’, identifying accounts that @WomenStrike22 followed, was followed by, and collaborated with. From this, I used snowball sampling to get ‘deeper and wider into the community’ (Kumar 2016, 212). Complementing this process, I then ‘followed the conflict’, searching hashtags related to the strike, such as #إضراب_نسائي_عام (General women’s strike) and #تضامن_عابر_للحدود (Solidarity Across Borders). For my broader ethnography, I purposively identified 100 accounts of different sizes working on GBV issues across the region on Twitter/X, Instagram, and Facebook, 49 of which posted about this wave of feminicides and 30 explicitly participated in the strike. This list is inexhaustive, but large enough for me to reach a level of some saturation. In Figure 1, I visualise this process, showing how accounts follow each other to generate a networked ecosystem.

I then began the immersion stage to understand the ecosystem’s languages and rituals. This involved two elements: observations and social media content analysis. I engaged with the ‘listening’ approach to observations of Trussell et al. (2019), attempting to understand the relationships and dynamics underlying actions. From this immersion, I catalogued and analysed relevant multimodal content using an inductive and data-driven approach to establish key ideas, themes, and trends.

This stage is complimented by the interactive stage in the form of semi-structured interviews with 20 activists. Taking a feminist approach to interviewing as something impacted by my positionality, verbal input, and lines of questioning, I consider this data co-produced by myself and the interlocutors. Anonymity for interlocutors was a

default unless explicitly waived. Due to my fractured knowledge of certain Arabic dialects, I worked with two translator/interpreters within the interviews and analysis.

Contesting the MENA

To interrogate how activists (re)configure and challenge regional publics, it is important to explore some dominant articulations of the MENA region. International Relations theorists stress the role of political actors and institutions in defining regions based on geopolitical strategy, deeply embedded in colonial imaginings, resource extraction, and military concerns (Bilgin 2004; Gasper 2011). Other MENA constructs are tied to shared ethnic, racial or cultural identities, joint histories, and the allegedly ubiquitous presence of the Islamic faith. Terms like the ‘Arab world’ are frequently used synonymously with the MENA, despite the presence of significant non-Arab minorities, and the implications that Iran and Turkey would be excluded (Monier 2014). Similarly, Islamic-ness as the foundation for understanding the region, with focus on the prevalence of Islamic law and institutions, has been criticised for erasing religious minorities, as well as contributing to the misconception that most of the world’s Muslims live in the MENA.

These debates have also been present in discourses surrounding GBV, with Salhi (2008, 296) positing that regions are often marked by their ‘patterns of gender oppression’. For Borrillo (2022, 143), the MENA is characterised by the comparatively high rates of GBV and specific types of violence, including ‘honour crimes’ and female genital mutilations. While Ghanem (2021) also centres the rate of GBV, she links the regionality of gender violence to ‘the “belt of classic patriarchy” of which the MENA region is part’. Mona Eltahawy’s (2012) controversial article, ‘Why do they hate us?’ locates the patriarchal violence across the region in a culture of hatred of women. Taking a more structuralist perspective, we can see how institutional approaches formalise and bureaucratised regionality, through international NGOs creating region-wide programmes and funding networks in their responses to GBV (Nusair 2009).

Discourse is also ongoing regarding who constructs and reproduces these regional definitions. Gasper (2011, 240) argues, ‘The Middle East exists because the West has possessed sufficient power to give the idea substance’. While this lens is essential for understanding how regional orderings are perpetuated through projects such as the War on Terror, it erases internal agency. Similarly, in ontological debates on the inherence of the region’s relatively high rates of GBV, Dalacoura (2019) highlights the pervasiveness of Islamophobia and Orientalism in narrating MENA women as a submissive underclass, placing regional GBV into discourses of Western cultural supremacy. We can see this in Potrafke’s (2014, 526) statement: ‘social globalisation is likely to promote gender equality because by using the Internet, women in Muslim majority countries learn about how women live in Western countries’. These frames contrast with narratives that centre indigenous actors. Pan-Arabists, for example, tie an ethnic identity to a geographical space as the basis of political, economic, and social allegiances, sometimes in response to the

external constructs. SWANA has emerged from postcolonial voices, commonly in the diaspora, rejecting the 'Middle East' and 'MENA' as Western-constructed and instead decentring the West and focusing on the geographic, continental region. For those that stress internal dimensions, some authors (Ayoob 2019; Sirriyeh 2000) explore the cultivation of and tensions within regional ties from above, stressing political structures and figures, while others (Laachir and Talajooy 2013; Maffi 2014) centre identification with a region from below, through cultural and social interactions. This research seeks to situate gender activists within this conversation, seeing how they themselves, through the use of digitally mediated technologies, relate and contribute to the formulation of the region.

In the face of these multiple terms, this article uses 'MENA' due to the official strike account adopting it in the English-language call to action. While doing so, I interrogate the term's use throughout, explore its multiple meanings, and highlight when alternatives are used.

Regional publics

Understanding the potential of activists to generate a regional public requires us to investigate current literature on transnational feminism. Stephan and Charrad (2020) argue that transnational feminist scholars, through their globalised application of 'intersectionality', have a tendency to diminish the local and national contexts of the MENA that proved so relevant during the 2010/11 revolutions. The globalised view of transnationalism can also be seen in the often relied upon binary between the local, the usually under-resourced third-world grassroots movements, contrasted with the transnational, represented by Western-dominated international NGOs operating on the global stage in an elitist manner (Basu 2000; Deb 2016; Naples and Desai 2002). As highlighted by Chhachhi and Abeysekera (2015), global approaches to transnationalism leave regional feminist solidarities underexplored. As such, questions of what defines a region in feminist activism and how one constitutes and interacts with it remain insufficiently answered, particularly relating to the MENA. The region as a site of community building, while underexplored academically, is not new. Nusair (2009) maps attempts at regional transnationalism in the 1990s onwards, in which MENA feminist groups developed their own 'intercultural worldviews'. They created regional networks, such as the Collectif Egalité Maghreb 95,⁶ to generate broad solidarities offering support, knowledge, and resources, and develop regional strategies to gender issues, in doing so, generating regional subjectivities similar to those Chhachhi and Abeysekera (2015) identify in South Asia.

While Nusair predominantly looks at formal organisations, digital spaces have offered fresh opportunities for new generations of activists operating both in and outside formal organisations to build regional solidarities. Sreberny (2015, 358), for example states, 'the Internet makes boundaries porous, blurring the inside and outside of national spaces, and emergent transnational interconnections between women in the region and beyond are worthy of analysis'.

Digital publics

Although digital technologies being space generative for feminist activists is widely accepted in the literature (Abd'Allah-Álvarez Ramírez 2018; Batmanghelichi and Mouri 2017; Daniels 2009; Moncayo 2020; Tuzcu 2016), debate is ongoing about the extent to which these spaces can transcend national borders and provide opportunity for regional publics. For Stephan (2007), the internet has effectively diminished the importance of national borders, as, due to the immediacy and relative low cost of digital technologies, communities are able to develop across them. Sharify-Funk (2014, 312) argues that the internet 'is beyond the boundaries of the nation', viewing the transnational as a 'form of "public space"' with internet users constituting the public. By removing many access and organisational barriers, digital activism could thus be seen to open up the possibility of a regional public space being developed for feminist organising.

However, this is not without limitation. Khiabany (2015) and others (Abd'Allah-Álvarez Ramírez 2018; Skalli 2014) have stressed the continued importance of localised and national contexts and identities within digital feminist activism, disrupting the formation of regional solidarities and publics. Further, while the costs of participation in activism may be reduced with digital technologies, significant access barriers still exist, excluding members of the region from any public spaces being generated. Although online campaigns frequently utilise more horizontal organisational models (Khamis 2014), research has consistently demonstrated that power structures prevalent in the physical world are transposed and sometimes exaggerated in the digital sphere (Abd'Allah-Álvarez Ramírez 2018; Eisenstein 1998; Sakr 2013). Daniels (2009), for example, stresses the ongoing relevance of gender, race, and class in digital spaces. These are exacerbated by the algorithms and profit incentives of digital platforms that invisibly privilege certain actors and forms of content (McPherson 2017). As such, the extent to which specific accounts can influence wider discourse is directly tied to a number of intersectional factors, in addition to gender, the most relevant here are class, internet access, linguistic ability, digital literacy, and situational context.

Acknowledging both the opportunities and exclusionary limitations of digital technologies, my research offers an intervention within this debate through evaluating activists' abilities to use social media platforms to develop solidarities across borders. In doing so, it simultaneously contributes to the call within transnational feminism literature to further develop our understanding of the resulting regional publics.

Situating the strike

Calls for a 6 July 2022 General Strike emerged in the context of decades of feminist organising against gender violence, invigorated and expanded through women's participation in popular political spaces in the Arab Spring (Eltantawy 2018; Langohr 2015). Innovation came, in part, through digital platforms offering new opportunities to cultivate alternative publics (Matos 2017). Digital technologies have fluctuated between being organisational tools for predominantly physical activities and sites for action in and of

themselves – often simultaneously. In revolutionary Egypt, we saw the formation of the HarassMap platform (<https://harassmap.org/en/>) which digitally mapped incidents of offline harassment (Abdelmonem 2015; Abdelmonem and Galán 2017), while in Morocco, online mobilisation surrounding the 2012 suicide of Amina El Filali contributed to modifying the law that had forced her to marry her rapist and ultimately take her own life (Ouassini 2021).⁷

More recently, during COVID-19, with isolation and rising rates of domestic violence, several interlocutors commented that feminist digital activism has been filling gaps left by deficient public services, many of which were not considered ‘essential’ under lockdown restrictions. Due to this and expanding internet usage, over the past four years the MENA has witnessed an influx of digital organising against GBV. In Egypt, the ‘ABZ’ case⁸ and Fairmont hotel rape allegations⁹ demonstrated the potential for digital activism to initiate legal proceedings against perpetrators (Eltantawy 2023). In Morocco, abortion rights and discriminatory legal articles, such as Penal Code Article 490, which disproportionately criminalises women for extra-marital sex, are issues that have been at the forefront of organising,¹⁰ while, in Algeria, several feminist groups have been digitally cataloguing feminicides.¹¹ Although a majority of the accounts predominantly frame issues through a national lens, some accounts claiming regional representation, such as ‘Feminism bl 3rbe’ (Feminism in Arabic, https://www.instagram.com/feminism_bl_3rbe/) and ‘Feminism Middle East’ (https://www.instagram.com/feminism_middle_east/), have also emerged looking to build a regional identity around feminist causes.

The Women’s General Strike, however, took things further, explicitly seeking to move beyond the nationalised framings exhibited within most of the digital GBV content, using the strike as a vehicle to do so. While traditional SMT focuses on strikes as co-ordinated labour movements with demands focusing on labour rights, the participants themselves conceptualised this strike more broadly, considering speaking up and building community in digital spaces as a mode of participation alongside withholding labour. A participating account, Feminist Consciousness (Instagram post, 2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/CfqyaAbsnWQ/?img_index=1) produced an educational resource about strikes as a mechanism for oppressed people to use their power to reject a system, here, patriarchal violence. This strike should thus be considered, in line with feminist theorising, as being more than a struggle for labour rights, but as being generative of spaces for connectivity and rupture, with the oppressed acting collectively to inhabit those spaces (Draper and Mason-Deese 2018).

Analysis

Framing GBV

The first stage of creating spaces of resistance is identifying and articulating the problem. How these accounts framed and constructed these incidents of violence as a regional wave of feminicides shapes how the region as a space is conceptualised. Across both the social media content and the interviews, we see multiple frames in play simultaneously.

While several activists positioned these cases in a global context, for example an account referring to them as part of a global campaign of violence against women, the strike mostly tied the violence to the region in explicit terms. Regional feminist platform, Sharika wa Laken, for example, stated, ‘هذه البقعة الجغرافية القاتلة و غير الآمنة للنساء’ (This geographical area is deadly and unsafe for women) (Instagram post, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CfJuzhXsggf/>). For some of the activists, these cases were drawn together as indicative of GBV in the region, due to their shared underlying causes. @Femicides_Algerie, an account cataloguing feminicides in Algeria, for example, considered this violence a result of pervasive structures of patriarchy that construe GBV as a form of paternalistic love, contrasting with Eltahawy’s (2012) claims that they are a product of hatred. The account connected these instances of violence by situating them within the context of ‘مجتمعاتنا الذكورية’ (our patriarchal societies), making patriarchal cultures the defining relevant characteristic of the region (Instagram post, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CfHm-odLJyB/>). Moroccan founder of the global intersectional feminist platform Politics4Her (<https://www.politics4her.com/>), Yasmina Benslimane (digital interview, February 2023), similarly identified the role of cultural beliefs in leading to certain forms of GBV being perpetuated, referencing the regional prevalence of honour killings. In both articulations, we see a challenge to the idea of the region being purely a Western-imposed construct, defined by (neo)colonial assumptions and interests, instead creating space for us to understand the MENA – and the GBV occurring within it – through the lens of situated cultural beliefs and practices being performed on a trans-societal scale.

Others considered the problem using a narrower institutional lens, seeing regional violence in relation to the failure of state infrastructures across the different national contexts. The official statement, reposted by dozens of accounts in the network, included this in the caption:

بأسف و خيبة و غضب ، كنا ولا زلنا نشاهد مؤسساتنا تتواطأ ضدنا ، ولا تلتزم بمسؤولياتها بوجوب حمايتنا ، و تتركنا باستهتار لمصائرنا أمام العنف ، تكتفي بالطبيلة على المفجوعين إن فضحت الجرائم ، بدلا من القيام بتغييرات جذرية و هيكلية و قانونية لوقف قتلنا سرا و علنا وضمن عدم تكراره. [With regret, disappointment, and anger, we were and still are] watching our institutions colluding against us, not adhering to their responsibilities to protect us, and recklessly leaving us to our fate in the face of violence, contenting themselves with comforting the bereaved if the crimes are exposed, instead of making radical, structural, and legal changes to stop our secret and public killings and ensure that it does not happen again]. (Instagram post, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CfT3EfCD08q/>)

The regionality of the problem thus centres the failure of state institutions to structurally protect women in the MENA from GBV. Regional feminist collective, Hypatia for Gender Justice (<https://www.hypatia4genderjustice.org/>), similarly conceptualised the problem in relation to institutions, seeing religious bodies working in tandem with state institutions to perpetuate and reproduce GBV (digital interview, April 2023), as such seeing contesting the primacy of religious institutions as another dimension of the regional struggle.

Focusing on the specific mechanisms of these particular cases, one Egyptian activist situated Nayera and Iman’s deaths within the broader context of growing regional networks of toxic masculinity in digital spaces (digital interview, January 2023). He linked these cases to the popularity of misogynistic figures such as Andrew Tate and Jordan

Peterson amongst young Middle Eastern men, demonstrating the porosity of digital cultures and the global prevalence of violent masculinities. Much of their content is mediated and repackaged in Arabic through local influencers who curate the content to appeal to specific cultural norms.¹² The interlocuter suggested that this dangerous cultural trend among young men in the region can be seen in the increased use of Telegram as a platform for cultivating growing communities that champion and advocate for violence against women. This digital factor was particularly relevant, the interlocuter explained, due to the viral video of Nayera's murder directly inspiring the killer of Iman Irsheed, and the orchestrated digital attacks against Nayera's friends and family in the following days. In this understanding, the region is being constructed in part by the networks of GBV perpetrators and apologists, with spaces of resistance to GBV therefore operating in opposition to these regional networks.

Several other commentators, including the Egyptian feminist conference E7na Initiative (Instagram post, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CfPXuh8rd7B/>) and Arz from Hypatia for Gender Justice (digital interview, April 2023), highlighted that many of the feminicides within this wave resulted from women saying 'no'. 'Whenever a woman would say no to a man like I don't want to marry you. I don't wanna do this. He would kill her. And that spread a lot of anxiety and fear among everyone' (Arz, digital interview, April 2023). From this perspective, the region is constructed through women experiencing violence stemming from their inability to say no. Systematic disempowerment of women is thus the source of regional violence against women. Activists also highlighted that many of these cases shared the characteristic of occurring in public. The regional coalition of Women Human Rights Defenders in the MENA created a digital campaign using the hashtag #PublicKillings, telling the stories of feminicides that occurred in public across the region. Politic4Her's Yasmina (digital interview, February 2023) and Arz (digital interview, April 2023) also stressed this dynamic, highlighting that the root of the problem lay in male entitlement to inflict harm on women even in public places.

From these different viewpoints, the regional problem of GBV is framed by activists at once in relation to particular structural causes stemming from culture or institutional failure, or/and due to the specific characteristics of the regional violence as situated in digital networks of misogyny; a response to women saying no; or an act frequently perpetuated in public. In doing so, we see the activists reproducing several narratives in the literature regarding misogynistic cultures, patriarchal interpretations of religion, and systematic disempowerment of women. Through acknowledging these frames, we should not, however, dismiss the women as submissive victims to culture and circumstance, as done in many Western accounts of MENA GBV, and instead see the activists as agents engaging in and employing these frames to then form networks and collective identities to resist the problems as they have been articulated.

Forming the regional network

According to Hypatia for Gender Justice members, the reach and effectiveness of organising across borders depends on digital technologies as they allow activists to build

networks and co-ordinate and communicate immediately in ways that would have been impossible in a pre-digital era (digital interview, April 2023). Here, we see that the formation of these networks was shaped by digital affordances and manifested through several mechanisms, including following and reposting.

Of the 100 anti-GBV accounts within the region that I identified within my broader research, 49 posted about the main cases that spurred the strike (Figure 2) and 30 explicitly participated within the strike (Figure 3). The arrows represent an account following another. As demonstrated by the density of arrows, some accounts within the network operate on the periphery – these are visually situated on the outskirts of the map, while others exist at the core of the network. In both maps we can see regional accounts, including the official strike account, are disproportionately situated towards the centre of the map. From this, we can establish that both accounts posting about the cases, and accounts participating in the strike, were engaged in networks with accounts that explicitly take a regional approach to GBV beyond this one campaign.

We can also see, from comparing Figures 2 and 3, that while accounts from across the region mobilised around these cases, the explicitly regional accounts played a particularly large role in the strike. This suggests that the strike was more effective in activating those that were already employing a regional lens. Algerian accounts also were disproportionately active in the campaign. Following on from analysis of their content, and discussion within interviews, it appears that this was largely driven by a desire to

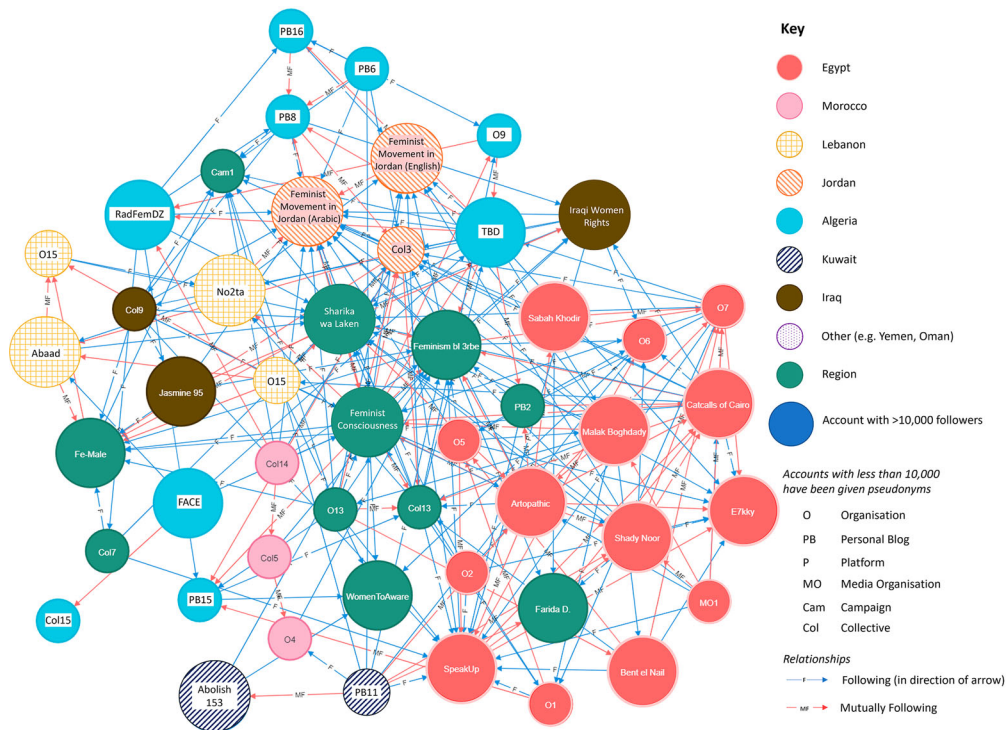


Figure 2. Accounts posting about the femicide wave.

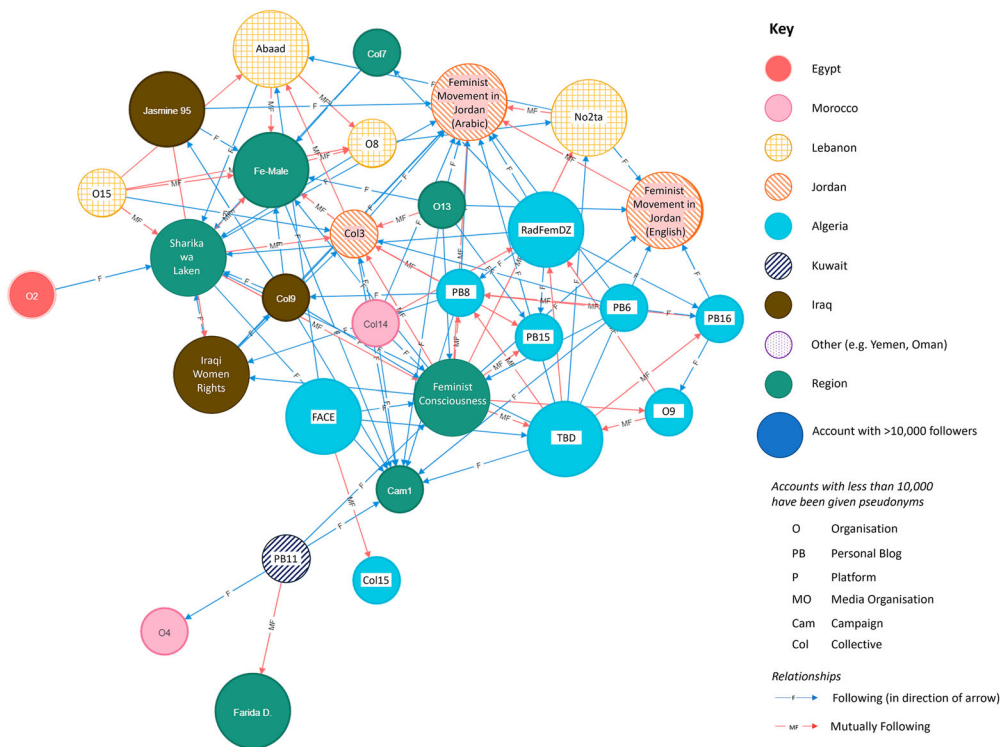


Figure 3. Accounts participating in the General Strike.

insert Algeria into regional conversations. Despite an Egyptian case acting as the catalyst, strike participation amongst Egyptian accounts was low. Egyptian activists instead tended to focus on the Egyptian cases, discussing other national contexts in a limited manner, or in ways that did not involve active strike participation. Due to the discourse already centring Egyptian cases both regionally and in international news, there was perhaps less need for the individual Egyptian accounts to join a regional strategy to amplify them.

Beyond following one another, the regional relationships were materially demonstrated through reposting content between accounts. In some instances, accounts shared content from other accounts wholesale, with the same caption, thus the network was predominantly in operation to expand the content's reach. For example, in Sharika wa Laken reposting the official strike statement with the same caption, they were expanding the reach of the original post to their over 49,000 followers. The regional network here operated as an amplifier.

Elsewhere, accounts reposted images or screenshots, while then adding their own commentary in the caption. Through this, accounts are shaping the content fragment and thus impacting the construction of the narrative. In Figure 4, for example, Algerian RadFemDz reposted an image from Egyptian feminist initiative SpeakUp. Although the image remained unchanged, RadFemDz edited the caption, adding hashtags that bring



Figure 4. RadFemDz reposting SpeakUp (https://www.instagram.com/p/CiFN_Ktlj2U/). The text on the image reads: Amani, 19 years old, killed in Menoufia at the hands of a young man for refusing his marriage proposal. The caption was translated from Arabic to English by the poster.

the case of Amani, a murdered Egyptian woman, within the broader regional campaign through the inclusion of the hashtag 'أوقفوا قتل النساء' (Stop killing women). Through placing the original post into a new context, the meaning is altered to be about more than just an individual case of femicide.

In this way, through regional information networks, activists adapt and reframe content to contribute to the fragmentary narratives.

By following each other, reposting and reframing content, the activists built up a network spanning the region that allowed for the dissemination of information and for individual accounts within the network to contribute their own framings.

Constructing regional solidarities

The foundation of the strike's collectivity is expressed in the slogan: 'Solidarity Across Borders', centring both solidarity and the imagining of a transnational space. Feminist scholarship has long debated and theorised solidarity, particularly the question of situating sameness and difference. For Nikunen (2019, 15), solidarity is about 'standing in unity with others and showing support in the struggle for justice', defining a generally positive phenomenon that implies a singular collective. More critical feminists argue that solidarity has deep links to white feminism, operating as a mechanism to fulfil saviour complexes perpetuating orientalist narratives (Maruggi 2012). This centres the power differential between Western women and the women experiencing the violence in question. Mohanty (2003) and Dean (1996) argue that solidarity is a space for

‘common differences’ in the pursuit of a shared interest, thus allowing for both sameness and difference. This has implications for what a public space rooted in solidarity looks like. A regionality founded on a solidarity of sameness may centre the similarities between experiences to formulate a more cohesive public space but may risk flattening important local and embodied differences. A solidarity built on difference, contrastingly, may be more prone to fracturing and fragmentation.

This diversity within the literature is reflected in how the interviewed activists themselves conceptualised solidarity. Egyptian E7na Initiative (digital interview, March 2023) and a Lebanese GBV organisation (digital interview, March 2023), on the one hand, consider solidarity a mechanism for supporting those experiencing violence, implying a distinction between the theoretical experiencers of the cause and those mobilising around said cause. Although that distinction may not always hold, it is ontologically present, meaning that people situating themselves within the regional public space may have different relationships to the problem. An Egyptian artist activist (digital interview, March 2023), on the other hand, saw solidarity as founded upon ‘our common struggle’, seeing solidarity and presence within the strike public therefore as relating to sameness and unity. A representative from regional account Sharika wa Laken (digital interview, July 2023) considered solidarity as a collective and shared set of values, upon which action is then based. Without those values in place, genuine solidarity cannot be formed. Here, it is shared values rather than shared experiences that underpin the regional solidarities. Building upon this and echoing Mohanty and Dean’s approach, Hypatia for Gender Justice (digital interviews, April and May 2023) stress the necessity of common understandings within solidarity, while acknowledging the role of important differences within it. For example, they stress the centrality of religion in the region as a patriarchal institution, pointing out, however, that different countries and communities experience and interact with religion differently. Here, they position solidarity in relation to the shared analysis of the problem, rather than the problem presenting itself equally in all contexts, constructing a solidarity that is not homogenous, but rather built around acknowledging variation.

Through these different conceptions of solidarity some activists, therefore, understand the regional public as built around sameness and unity, while others see it as a space that should incorporate difference. Through a wide range of actors being able to contribute diverse perspectives on the framings of GBV, the nature of solidarity, and the bounding of the region outlined next, we can see how regional solidarities here were effectively cultivated across these differences. However, as this research explores, some divisions proved to undermine the solidarities being formed, fragmenting the regional public.

Bordering regional solidarities

The language of the campaign across various accounts consistently used the terms ‘we’, ‘our’, and ‘us’, which as Ayers (2003) argues, are central to the formation of shared identities. The official @WomenStrike22 statement defines the strike’s *we* as: ‘we, the women in the MENA region’, situating the strike space in a specific location. Through this

language, participating activists solidified the collectivity of the strike identity while explicitly and consistently tying that identity to the region.

In cultivating this shared identity, activists were also tasked with bordering and defining that region. Interestingly, in the Arabic version of the statement, instead of using the direct translation of MENA which would be 'الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا', the strike organisers used 'المنطقة من المحيط إلى الخليج' (the area from the ocean to the Gulf), situating the strike within a geographical area rather than a geopolitical category (Instagram post, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CfT3EfCDo8q/>). Politics4Her's Yasmina Benslimane, contrastingly, took the SWANA approach discussed previously, centring the ontological agency of decolonial indigenous and diasporic voices (digital interview, February 2023). Others situated the campaign in relation to Arabness, amongst them Lebanese GBV organisation Abaad declaring solidarity 'في عالمنا العرب' (in our Arab World) (Instagram post, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CfpUnNZMUVL/>) and Iraqi Feminist @Jasmine95 using 'الوطن العربي' (the Arab World) (Instagram post, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cfq0RKfvPXD/>). While 'Arab' was used on multiple occasions to delineate the region, users of the term did not explicitly position it in contestation or tension with the word MENA. However, through privileging ethnic identity, this approach at once reproduces narratives that homogenise the ethnically diverse region, something problematised by Politics4Her's Yasmina due to its erasure of the Amazigh population within Morocco (digital interview, 2023), while also decentring the importance of Western-imposed geopolitical categorisations in favour of narratives of shared identities.

The region was also visually depicted through the use of maps. Hypatia for Gender Justice, for example, posted a video containing the map in Figure 5.

In the map, we can see the inclusion of some countries commonly excluded from definitions of the MENA, such as Somalia and Mauritania. Through making these decisions, Hypatia are expanding who falls within the affected space. An Algerian account and Sharika wa Laken both made explicit reference to Sudan being within the strike's scope. When posting images of participants, RadFemDz included an image of the Syrian Opposition flag (https://www.instagram.com/p/CfrZc5_D-Yg/), indicating that within her conceptualisation of the region, Syria is represented by the opposition rather than the official state government. Another strike participant included #کردستان (Kurdistan) on their post. Féminicides Algérie added a porosity to the border, after listing several MENA countries adding, 'و غيرها بلداننا التي تشارك نفس الفكر' (and other countries that share the same idea), with 'idea' here referring to the acceptance of patriarchal violence as a form of love discussed earlier (Instagram post, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CfHm-odLJyB/>). Thus, while the strike was consistently considered a regional campaign, how that region was defined differed. Some activists restricted it to refer to Arab-majority countries, while others expanded the definition to include non-Arab countries such as Sudan and countries irrespective of their geographical proximity, based on their cultural practice of violence. Politicised decisions were made which demonstrate how entities diverging from internationally recognised Westphalian sovereign states, such as Kurdistan and the Syrian Opposition, can be included within a regional imagining. Who



Figure 5. Hypatia for Gender Justice screenshot, Facebook post, 2022 (<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=720928262526634>).

could constitute the regional public and therefore who could occupy the resulting regional public space that the strike was creating, in this way proved to be diverse, fluid, and dynamic.

This fluidity is also reflected in the way in which different identities were centred at varying points throughout the strike. Despite it being a regional campaign, at times national identities were still privileged, for example, with the use of #الأردن (#Jordan) in the top corner of the Sharika wa Laken post regarding Iman Irsheed shown in Figure 6).

The use of flags had a similar effect, with RadFemDz's participant images containing images of flags in the top corner, to centre the national identity of the individual resisting. Algerian activists were particularly keen to centre Algerian women. For example, one post from Féminicides Algérie shows images of Algerian women murdered in recent years, placing it under the strike umbrella through the use of the strike hashtag (Instagram post, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CfmXWlVDb00/>). The Algerian feminist account, TBD (Instagram post, 2022) specifically thanked the strike organisers for the idea of a strike in a post outlining specific instructions for how Algerian women could participate. One Algerian activist interviewed said that her participation in the strike was specifically to insert Algeria into the conversation, something that she felt had been absent:



Figure 6. Sharika wa Laken Instagram post, 2022. The text on image reads: ‘There is no room for safety or life in our homelands.’ Iman Irsheed was shot dead inside her university campus.

‘Algerian women matter too’ (digital interview, May 2023). In this way, Algerian activists used the attention generated in the strike as an opportunity to highlight the plight of GBV within the national context. As such, within the framework of a public space formed from regional solidarities, national distinctions were made and, in some moments, centred, constructing narrower publics and foundations for solidarity.

Even more nuanced was the public space being shaped by acknowledgement of differences between the contexts. For example, *Féminicides Algérie* stated, ‘من المغرب وموريتانيا والجزائر وتونس ومصر إلى السعودية والعراق والأردان ...’ (From Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt, to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan ...) (Instagram post, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CfHm-odLJyB/>), subtly differentiating between North African countries and the Arabian peninsula, implying a distinction between the two. More explicitly, when interviewed, several activists highlighted important differences between the cases of feminicide happening within the different national contexts. Tunisia was raised, several times, as having progressed further in relation to GBV (Nasri, digital interview, October 2023; Wafa, Hypatia for Gender

Justice, digital interview, May 2023). Other contextual differences were highlighted, for example, a representative from Lebanese GBV organisation Kafa (digital interview, May 2023) stressed the specific sectarian context within Lebanon as shaping how GBV manifests, while Moroccan activist Lamya Ben Malak (interview, June 2023) highlighted that each country's legal structure makes the procedures and possibilities for reform different. Politics4Her's Yasmina (digital interview, February 2023) stressed that in Morocco there is the ethnic dimension of the indigenous Amazigh community as well as the importance of the African identity, positioning Morocco in a specific way in relation to the Arab-dominated MENA. This then reveals how different identities are present within a wider collective identity founded upon regional solidarities.

Through exploring the formation of this collective identity, we can see how multiple constructions of the region existed simultaneously. Not only were these differently bounded, they also were made up of a conglomeration of other varied identities, such as the nation or the African continent. This challenges discourses that suggest the region is fixed, homogenous, or exclusively an external (neo)colonial imposition. As I go on to explore, however, these different identities did not always operate in harmony, disrupting the regional solidarities that formed around them.

Limitations and exclusion

Although some participants took an idealistic perspective on regional campaigning, with an Egyptian artist activist expounding that there are 'no boundaries, there are no countries. We are in this together' (digital interview, March 2023), the space created by the strike was simultaneously experienced by others as limited and exclusionary beyond debate over where the regional borders lie. These vulnerabilities fractured the regional solidarities and the strength of the networked relationships, disrupting the strike's potential to produce a lasting regional public space.

While calls for a strike did activate a network of activists, the looseness of the network ties that formed were prone to breakdown. As Kanagasabai and Phadke (2023) demonstrate, friendship can play a central role in the formulation of new and lasting subjectivities within feminist campaigning. However, the close supportive friendships and informal WhatsApp groups that interlocutors spoke of within national organising efforts were not formed to the same extent between cross-national participants during the strike. Although a Lebanese organisation representative did speak of interactions across the region, these were dominated by more formal co-ordination efforts (digital interview, March 2023). As such, while regional networks were activated, and proved important for resource sharing and mobilisation, the relationships formed were largely perfunctory, focused on short-term strike organising, and thus subject to dissolution once the campaign had ended. It is possible, however, that these networks, while loose, have the potential to be reactivated in future calls to action. We have seen, for example, some collaborations on the issue of genocide in Gaza (Instagram, 2024, Sharika wa Laken et al., <https://www.instagram.com/p/C2r33SwNtzip/>).

Although the regional public being founded on a solidarity of difference did allow for some diversity in the ranks, it also resulted in tensions arising between contrasting perspectives that led to fragmentation. Arz from Hypatia details how the strike organiser's marital status became a source of contention for a select group of strike participants, causing tension and breakdown within the movement. Thus, although participants developed regional solidarities regarding GBV, these solidarities did not extend to other gender issues, such as the privileging of certain marital statuses. Similarly, although a diversity in framings of the causes of regional GBV were central to the strike, some perspectives proved to be too divisive. Disagreements over the role of religious institutions in reproducing patriarchal violence was raised by several interlocuters. Arz recalls how, to keep the momentum from the first strike going, several organisations came together to plan a second one. These efforts fell largely flat, however, due to some activists raising the issue of religion and the hijab, leading to the coalition separating with significant differences of opinion (digital interview, April 2023). Again, contradictions between the different imaginings of regional solidarity made the regional public space vulnerable to fragmentation.

It also generated exclusionary hierarchies. As discussed, Egyptian cases were disproportionately centred by both activists and the international press;¹³ to rectify this, an Algerian interlocuter commented that she originally participated in the strike to insert Algeria into the conversation. However, she did not feel she was successful: 'I don't feel that we are really that included in the MENA region ... Algeria has an invisibility coat so that no one is seeing it ... Even in the articles that were written [about the strike], Algeria was completely disregarded' (digital interview, May 2023). As a result of her perceived disregard of Algerian women within the campaign, she concluded that she would not participate in MENA-wide events again, instead prioritising the national context within her future organising. This demonstrates that although activists in theory consistently included Algeria within their imaginings of a regional public space, extending their claims of solidarity to as far as Mauritania in some examples, for this Algerian activist, those solidarities did not translate to Algeria feeling included, supported, or even seen. The disparity between the imaginings of a diverse and expansive regional public and the exclusionary reality reveals the limitations of the regional solidarities.

Exclusionary hierarchies were also reflected in the demographics of the activists participating in the strike with implications upon the solidarities formed. Mirroring previous analysis that argues digital technologies have allowed the MENA diaspora to have significant influence over political and social discourse in their homeland (Arafat 2022), individuals in the diaspora played a disproportionate role in this campaign. While I cannot quantify the total representation of diasporic figures, as many strike participants have their identities and locations obscured, several interlocuters were living predominantly outside the region. Although it would be simplistic to suggest that members of the diaspora face no risk, as one of my interview participants highlighted fearing the consequences of his activism on his mother's safety as she remained in Egypt, many scholars (Banaji and Moreno-Almeida 2021; Eltantawy 2023; Skalli 2014) have noted that people situated in the region practise self-censorship impacting

their participation in political and social actions. Furthermore, those interviewed were disproportionately university-educated, often noting that their experiences at university were formative in their personal journey with gender activism (both positively and negatively). This reflects previous findings that wealthier, more-educated individuals are over-represented in digital activism. Reflecting on the power imbalances that impact digital access and influence, it is evident that public spaces formed online are not disembodied and removed from context, as we see these exclusionary hierarchies at play.

Conclusion

While debates over what the MENA (or alternative vocabulary referring to the region) comprises of wage on, it is clear that activists hold ontological agency in defining it and should therefore be included within the conversation. Emerging from a rich history of gender activism in the MENA is a growing and innovating ecosystem of digital activists mobilising against GBV, continuously creating new spaces and challenging existing ones. The 6 July 2022 strike stands out due to its explicit calls for a regional approach, cultivating the potential of a regional public space rooted in regional solidarities. Although the framing of GBV as a regional problem was present across the strike, activists identified the causes differently, from structural, institutional, and cultural problems to those centring the specific characteristics of these feminicides. While many of these frames mirror those in the literature, they directly challenge Orientalist approaches that portray women as passive victims of regional GBV, instead asserting agency in defining problems and then creating networks and collective action in response.

Through the mechanism of a strike, a network was built by activists following, sharing, and reframing each other's content. Participation of activists was not, however, uniform across the region, with Algerian accounts and accounts already adopting a regional approach having higher rates of involvement. The strike's collective identity was built around the concept of regional solidarity, which participating activists approached in a range of ways, thinking differently about how to incorporate sameness and difference. These differences manifested in the numerous ways activists defined the region, impacting how the regional public space was formulated and bounded. Within that variety, we saw commonly applied boundaries, such as excluding Sudan being challenged, while others, such as the ethnic Arab dominance, often being upheld. Under the regional strike umbrella, various other identities and contexts, such as nationality, remained relevant and were in some moments central, highlighting a multiplicity within the regional public being generated. Although many activists praised the value of these differences within the movement, some divisions over identity and GBV framing, such as the role of religion and the insufficient attention paid to Algeria, proved to undermine the solidarities built. Fundamentally, the loose transnational network ties combined with this heterogeneity meant that the regional public (re)produced exclusionary hierarchies and was prone to dissolution, limiting the

strike's impact and legacy. Furthermore, the demographics of the activists suggest that offline power dynamics had to an extent been reproduced in the digital spaces, echoing findings in the literature and suggesting that ontological agency in cases such as these remains disproportionately in the hands of the multilingual, educated economic elite. Despite these limitations, this strike still demonstrates how digital organising can offer new opportunities to both generate regional solidarities and reconfigure and reproduce understandings of what the region is. By considering activists as agents in defining the MENA through their articulation of, and response to GBV, rather than being disempowered and victimised by both patriarchal violence and (neo)colonial top-down systems of ordering, this research contributes to decolonising our understanding of transnational feminist solidarities and the regional public spaces that they have the potential to create.

Notes

1. Nayera Ashraf, 21, was stabbed outside Mansoura University, Egypt in June 2022, after reportedly rejecting a colleague's marriage proposal. Her murder was filmed by a passerby and the video went viral across social media. The perpetrator was sentenced to death and executed by the state. Unlike many feminicides in the MENA, this incident was widely reported on by international media, including CBS News: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/nayera-ashraf-video-death-murder-egypt-violence-against-women/> and The National: <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/2023/06/14/egypt-executes-killer-of-university-student-nayera-ashraf/>.
2. Iman Irsheed, 21, was shot to death outside her university in Amman, Jordan in June 2022, after reportedly rejecting the perpetrator. After the killing, screenshots of threatening messages directly referencing the killing of Nayera Ashraf allegedly sent by the perpetrator to Iman circulated on social media. This case was reported by regional media, and also referenced by the *Washington Post*: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/08/killings-university-women-egypt-jordan/>.
3. Lubna Mansour, a Jordanian woman of Palestinian origin in her 20s was found stabbed to death by her husband in June 2022. See <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2022/06/28/Tributes-to-Lubna-Mansour-pour-in-following-her-murder-in-Sharjah>.
4. Egyptian TV presenter Shaima Gamal was found murdered by her husband in June 2022, after concerns about her whereabouts and safety went viral across Egyptian social media: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/nepows/egypt-judge-accused-murder-wife-journalist>.
5. Young Algerian student, Manal Qadash, was allegedly stabbed to death by a colleague at Bab Ezzouar University. See https://www.facebook.com/MALIMaroc09/posts/5183929811689418/?locale=ms_MY&paipv=0&eav=Afb0m5Z9z7o5Z-os3w_KiKkcX-RPPofoLJqrtSdyiZDKSsqfCH0q60tAgZ_BpW1cfCc&_rdr.
6. The Collectif Egalité Maghreb 95 is a collective of women's rights organisations that began in the early 1990s to build a network across three countries in the Maghreb: Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. Headquartered in Morocco, it has now expanded across the Mediterranean region.
7. Prior to the case of Amina El Filali, Article 475 of the Moroccan penal code allowed rapists to avoid prosecution if they married their victim, effectively de-criminalising rape in certain circumstances. In March 2012, Amina, 16, committed suicide after being forced to marry her rapist at age 15. This prompted nation-wide organising, including across social media, calling to repeal the article. In 2014, the article was modified by the parliament to allow for the prosecution of individuals who abuse minors. The modification was widely criticised as insufficient by feminists.

See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17379721> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/23/morocco-law-rapists-marry>.

8. Referred to in Egypt widely as the ‘ABZ’ case, in July 2020 years’ worth of allegations against Ahmed Bassam Zaki for sexual harassment and violence went viral across social media, stemming from the now-dormant account @AssaultPolice. Due to the online mobilising, Zaki was imprisoned and charged. See <https://egyptianstreets.com/2023/08/18/egypts-court-of-cassation-upholds-eight-year-sentence-in-ahmed-bassam-zaki-case/>.
9. Allegations of a gang-rape that took place in 2014 at Cairo’s Fairmont Nile City Hotel went viral across social media in the summer of 2020. Numerous high-profile individuals were named as alleged rapists in the mass online mobilisation. After the campaign’s initial success, with most alleged perpetrators being apprehended, the case was later dropped by the Egyptian Public Prosecution due to lack of evidence. Activists claim that there was campaign of witness intimidation and significant problems within the investigation. See <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2021/09/02/feature/politics/witnesses-arrested-and-intimidated-how-the-fairmont-rape-case-fell-apart/>.
10. After the 2019 arrest of Moroccan journalist Hajar Raissouni over an alleged abortion as a product of extra-marital sex, Moroccan activists mobilised around calling for the repeal of Article 490, which criminalises sex outside marriage. This campaign has been led by NGO Moroccan Outlaws. See <https://www.newarab.com/news/morocco-ban-extramarital-relations-divides-politicians#:~:text=Under%20Article%20490%20of%20the,of%20one%20to%20two%20years>.
11. The effort to catalogue feminicides has been led by Féminicides Algérie, who publish annual lists on their website of women who have been murdered in Algeria.
12. This can be seen, for example, through the obsession amongst ‘Akh Right Brothers’ (misogynistic digital influencers who use Islamic framings) about Andrew Tate’s conversion to Islam.
13. This imbalance is also reflected in Egypt being disproportionately represented in academic research on gender activism in the region.

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